

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 15, 2003

Contact:

Anne Johnson, Director of Communications, (202) 523-3240, ext. 27

WASHINGTON – U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Vice Chair Felice D. Gaer addressed the special session on anti-Semitism at the Annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Warsaw, Poland on October 14, 2003. Ms. Gaer stated that acts of anti-Semitism must be seen not as hooliganism, but as a form of human rights abuse that states should vigorously combat by implementing their worldwide human rights commitments. She called on the OSCE Ministerial Council, at its December 2003 meeting in Maastricht, Netherlands, to accept the German government's invitation to host a special meeting on anti-Semitism in Berlin in 2004. She also urged the OSCE to report regularly on the implementation of OSCE member states' commitments to combat anti-Semitism. Ms. Gaer was participating with the U.S. delegation to the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. The text of her remarks follows:

STATEMENT BY FELICE D. GAER

VICE CHAIR

U. S. COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

I am speaking on behalf of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, which is an independent United States government agency that monitors conditions of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion around the globe. The Commission makes independent policy recommendations to the U.S. administration and the Congress on how to advance this fundamental right and all those related to it through U.S. foreign policy.

We have emphasized a simple but extremely important point: that acts of anti-Semitism must be seen for what they are: they are not hooliganism; they are human rights abuses. They are a form of human rights abuse that states should vigorously combat by implementing their worldwide human rights commitments.

Anti-Semitism is both a local and an international problem, requiring states to take concrete steps on both the domestic and international levels. Recognition of a resurgence of anti-Semitism throughout the OSCE is a good first step. The OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism last June provided a constructive venue to examine the problem and propose programs and practices to address it. We must move beyond recognition of the problem to concrete action within the OSCE to ensure that all participating states are living up to their commitments in this area, in particular to combat anti-Semitism, as contained in the 1990 Copenhagen Document: These include adopting laws to protect against incitement to violence based on discrimination including anti-Semitism, and providing the individual with effective remedies to initiate complaints against acts of discrimination.

The German government invited states to a meeting on anti-Semitism in Berlin in 2004, and we urge the HDIM to recommend its acceptance and, in turn, urge the Ministerial meeting to endorse it.

The history of anti-Semitism in the OSCE region has unfortunately been a distinctive one and its recent resurgence in the OSCE countries has followed its own course, as well. States that have had the most success in combating anti-Semitism have done so by taking measures specifically aimed at eradicating anti-Semitism, including some within the context of measures to combat discrimination, intolerance, xenophobia, etc. In other words, a separate track and separate attention is needed.

Statistics, monitoring, reporting publicly and regularly about compliance and violations are essential to realize any serious human rights commitments.

We emphasize the need for:

„h Assignment within OSCE, perhaps in the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the responsibility to monitor and report regularly on anti-Semitic incidents and the implementation of state|s Copenhagen commitments.

„h Review of state compliance within the OSCE on a regular basis.

„h Acceptance of the German invitation to host an OSCE meeting on anti-Semitism in Berlin.

The meeting in Berlin should be different than the first, and participating states and the ODHIR should ensure that the meeting moves us forward in evaluating the strategies, documentation, commitments, and implementation of the OSCE states with regard to the struggle against anti-Semitism

In terms of international cooperation on combating anti-Semitism, as with many human rights issues, the OSCE is a key venue through which to advance this. And the OSCE has a special obligation to exhibit vigorous leadership on this issue to show the rest of the international community that this is an important issue and that political will can make a real difference in combating anti-Semitism. We hope that kind of leadership will be emerging in other international and regional institutions. But we have been disappointed by their failure to address this topic seriously in their reporting and other human rights work. We earnestly hope OSCE will not continue in their direction. That is why the recommendations that emerge from this meeting are so vital and so closely monitored.

In conclusion, we reiterate: anti-Semitism is not hooliganism, it|s human rights abuse.